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The Relation of Archæology and History

By Carl Russell Fish, Ph. D.

[From the Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for 1910
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Madison
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The derivation of the word *archæology* gives little idea of its present use. "The study of antiquity" is at once too broad in scope and too limited in time—for the followers of a dozen other "ologies" are studying antiquity, while the archæologist does not confine himself to that period. The definition of the word in the *New English Dictionary* corrects the first of these errors, but emphasizes the second, for it describes it as, "The scientific study of remains and monuments of the prehistoric period." This obviously will not bear examination, for the bulk of archæological endeavor falls within the period which is considered historical; I cannot conceive any period prehistoric, about which archæology, or any other science, can give us information. Actually, time has nothing whatever to do with the limitations of archæology; to think of it as leaving off where history begins, is to misconceive them both. The only proper limitation upon archæology lies in its subject matter. I conceive that it cannot further be defined than as, "The scientific study of human remains and monuments."

In considering the relations of the science to history, I do not wish to enter into any war of words as to the claims of "sociology," "anthropology," and "history" to be the inclusive word, covering the totality of man's past, but simply to use history as it is generally understood at present, and as its professors act upon it. Certainly we are no longer at the stage where history

¹ First read before the Wisconsin Archæological Society at Madison, July 29, 1910.



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could be defined as "past politics;" it is equally certain that there are fields of human activity which are not actually treated in any adequate way by the historian. The relations of the two do not depend on the definition of history; the more broadly it is interpreted, the more intimate their relationship becomes. The sources of history are three-fold: written, spoken, and that which is neither written nor spoken.

To preserve and prepare the first, is the business of the philologist, the archivist, the paleographer, the editor, and experts in a dozen subsidiary sciences. The historian devotes so much the larger part of his time to this class of material, that the period for which written materials exists is sometimes spoken of as the "historical period," and the erroneous ideas of archæology which I have quoted, become common.

Least important of the three, is the spoken or traditional; although if we include all the material that was passed down for centuries by word of mouth before being reduced to writing, such as the Homeric poems or the Norse sagas, it includes some of the most interesting things we know of the past. In American history, such material deals chiefly with the Indian civilizations, and its collection is carried on chiefly by the anthropologists. In addition, nearly every family preserves a mass of oral traditions running back for about a hundred years; and there is a small body of general information, bounded by about the same limit, which has never yet been put into permanent form. The winnowing of this material, to secure the occasional kernels of historic truth that it yields, is as yet a neglected function.

The material that is neither written nor oral, falls to the geologist and the archæologist. Between these two sciences there is striking similarity, but their boundaries are clear: the geologist deals with natural phenomena, the archæologist with that which is human, and which may, for convenience, be called monumental. The first duty of the archæologist is to discover such material and to verify it; the next is to secure its preservation, preferably its actual tangible preservation—but if that is not possible, by description. Then comes the task of studying it, classifying and arranging it, and making it ready for use. At this point the function of the archæologist ceases, and the duty of the historian begins—to interpret it, and to bring it into harmony with the

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recognized body of information regarding the past. It is not necessary in every case, that different individuals do these different things. We must not press specialization too far. Nearly every historian should be something of an archæologist, and every archæologist should be something of an historian. When the archæologist ceases from the preparation of his material, and begins the reconstruction of the past, he commences to act as an historian; he has to call up a new range of equipment, a new set of qualifications.

The fields in which the services of archæology are most appreciated, are those to which written and oral records do not reach. Its contributions in pressing back the frontier of knowledge are incalculable, and are growing increasingly so with every passing year. To say nothing of what it has told us of the civilizations of Egypt and Assyria, it has given to history within the last few years the whole great empire of the Hittites. We have learned more of Mycenæan civilization from archæology, than from Homer. Practically all we know of the Romanization of Britain is from such sources, and that process, not long ago regarded almost as a myth, is now a well-articulated bit of history. In America, within the last thirty-five years, by the joint work of the archæologist and the anthropologist, many of the points long disputed concerning the Indians have been set at rest; more knowledge of them has been recovered than was ever before supposed possible; new questions have been raised, which incite renewed activity. From all over the world, moreover, remains of the past, amounting to many times those now known, call for investigation. It is safe to say that within the next fifty years more sensational discoveries will be made by following material, rather than written, records.

It is, however, not only in the periods void of written sources, that archæology can perform its services. It is in the period of classical antiquity that we find the combination happiest. There, indeed, it is difficult to find an historian who does not lay archæology under tribute, or an archæologist who is not lively to the historical bearing of his work. When we come to the medieval period, the situation is less ideal; the historian tends to pay less attention to monuments, and the archæologist becomes an antiquarian, intent upon minutia, and losing sight of

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his ultimate duty. In the modern period, the historian, self-satisfied with the richness of his written sources, ignores all others; and the archæologist, always with a lingering love for the unusual and for the rust of time, considers himself absolved from further work.

As one working in this last period, I wish to call the attention of American archæologists to some possibilities that it offers. Abundant as are our sources, they do not tell the whole story of the last couple of centuries, even in America: we have monuments which are worthy of preservation, and which can add to our knowledge of our American ancestors, as well as of our Indian predecessors. Even in Wisconsin, something may be obtained from such sources.

The most interesting of our monumental remains are, of course, the architectural. Everybody is familiar with the log cabin, although something might yet be gathered as to the sites selected for them, and minor differences in construction. Less familiar is the cropping out of the porch in front, the spreading of the ell behind, and the two lean-to wings, then the sheathing with clap-boards, the evolution of the posts into Greek columns, and the clothing of the whole with white paint, all representing stages in the prosperity of the occupants. In nearly every older Wisconsin township may be found buildings representing every one of these stages—the older ones indicating poor land or unthrifty occupants, and being generally remote from the township centre, or else serving as minor farm buildings, in the rear of more pretentious frame or brick structures. In the same way the stump fence, the snake fence, and the wire fence, denote either advance or retardation of progress. Other studies of economic value may be made from the use of different kinds of building materials. The early use of local stone, is one of the features of Madison; its subsequent disuse was due not so much to the difficulty of quarrying as to the decreased cost of transportation, making other materials cheaper, and was coincident with the arrival of the railroads. Very interesting material could be obtained from the abandoned river towns, which still preserve the appearance of fifty years ago, and furnish us with genuine American ruins.

On the whole, the primitive log cabins were necessarily much

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alike; but when the log came to be superseded by more flexible material, the settler's first idea was to reproduce the home or the ideal of his childhood, and the house tends to reveal the nationality of its builder. Just about Madison, there are farm houses as unmistakably of New England as if found in the "Old Colony," and others as distinctly of Pennsylvania or the South. I am told of a settlement of Cornishmen, which they have made absolutely characteristic; even the automobilist may often distinguish the first Wisconsin home of the German, the Englishman, or the Dutchman. Where have our carpenters, our masons, and finishers come from, and what tricks of the trade have each contributed?

Such studies reveal something also of the soul of the people. Not so much in America, to be sure, as in Europe, where national and individual aspirations find as legitimate expression in architecture, as in poetry; and less here in the West, which copied its fashions, than in the East, which imported them. Still, we have a few of the Greek-porticoed buildings which were in part a reflection of the influence of the first French Republic, and in part represented the admiration of the Jeffersonian democracy for the republics of Greece; but before Wisconsin was settled, that style had almost passed away. We have a number of the composite porticoed and domed buildings, which succeeded and represented perhaps the kinship between the cruder democracy of Jackson and that of Rome. We have many buildings, both public and private—some, extremely beautiful—which reflect the days in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the best minds in America drew inspiration from the Italy of the Renaissance, when Story and Crawford, and Hawthorne and Margaret Fuller lived and worked in Rome. The succeeding period is everywhere illustrated, when the French mansard stands for the dominating influence on things artistic (or rather, inartistic) of the Second Empire. The revival of English influence, is indicated in the Queen Anne style; the beginning of general interest in American history, in the colonial; the influence of the War with Spain, in the square cement. Many other waves of thought and interest, can be pointed out in almost any town. A careful study of its architecture will nearly always reveal the approximate date of foundation, the periods of prosperity and depression, the

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origin of the inhabitants, and many other facts of real importance.

I have thus far spoken of the contribution of archæology to the science of history. Fully as great, are its possibilities along the lines of popularization and illustration. The work of neither archæology nor history can proceed without popular support, and the local appeal is one of the strongest that can be made. Not every town has an interesting history; but almost every one, however ugly, can be made historically interesting to its inhabitants if its streets can be made to tell its history, and by reflection something of the history of the country; this may be done merely by opening their eyes to their chirography. It should be part of the hope of the local archæologist to make his neighbors and his neighbor's children see history in everything about them. If this is accomplished, we may hope gradually to arouse a deeper and more scientific interest, and a willingness to encourage that research into the whole past, in which historian and archæologist are jointly interested.

On a recent visit to Lake Koshkonong, I found my interest much stimulated by a certain admirable map, and some plates illustrating the Indian life about its shores. It has occurred to me that one extremely valuable way of arousing general interest and of arranging our archæological data, would be in a series of such minute maps. For instance, the first in the series would give purely the physical features; the next, on the same scale, would add our Indian data—mounds, village sites, cultivated fields, arrow factories, battlefields, trails, and any other indications that might appear; then, one on the entrance of the white men, with trading posts, garrisons, first settlements and roads; the next would begin with the schoolhouse and end with the railroad; and one or two others would complete the set. Such studies of the material changes of a locality, would not form an embellishment, but the basis of its history.

Another work might be undertaken through the local high school. The pupils might be encouraged to take photographs of houses, fences, bridges, and other objects—interesting for the reasons I have pointed out—as well as all objects of aboriginal interest. These should always be dated, and the place where they were taken noted. In fact, a map should be used, and by

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numbers or some such device, the pictures localized. These photographs, properly classified and arranged, would give such a picture of the whole life of the community in terms of tangible remains, as could not fail to interest its inhabitants as well as serve the student. In the newer portions of the State, particularly in the north, it would be possible to take pictures of the first clearing, and then file these away; a few years later, one could take another picture of the farmstead, with its improvements—and so on, until it reached a condition of stability. Thus to project into the future the work of a science whose name suggests antiquity, may seem fantastic, but even the future will ultimately become antiquity. We have still in Wisconsin, some remnants of a frontier stage of civilization which is passing and cannot be reproduced, and it cannot be held superfluous to provide materials to express it to the future. If we may imagine the joy that it would give to us to find a photograph of the site of Rome before that city was built, or of one of the great Indian villages of Wisconsin before the coming of the white man, we may form a conception of the value to the future student of the civilization of our own day of such an ordered and scientific collection as I have suggested.







